



Engraving of Diocletian's palace by L. F. Cassas, 1782, published in his 1802 *Voyage pittoresque et historique de l'Istrie et de la Dalmatie*

History/Architecture Four Emperors and an Architect: How Robert Adam Rediscovered the Tetrarchy

Alicia Salter
(Lexicon Publishing, £20)

THIS INGENIOUSLY structured book looks at Robert Adam's recording of Diocletian's Palace at Spalatro in 1757 and his resulting publication, from a new angle. Adam's work is set in the context of the Roman tetrarchy in the 3rd century AD. Alternate chapters deal with imperial Rome, Grand Tour Rome, with Adam's studies and travels, the visit to Spalatro and his architectural work in London inspired by Diocletian's Palace there, interleaved with Diocletian's

own career and that of his fellow Roman Tetrarchs.

When Diocletian became emperor in AD284, finding his huge territories unwieldy and the capital, Rome, too far from the main action of the day in the east Mediterranean, he turned the empire into a tetrarchy. It was to be ruled jointly by two senior and two junior emperors, all with their own capitals away from Rome; Diocletian ruled the East and, in about AD296, built the palace at Spalatro on the coast of Dalmatia (now called Split), where he eventually retired and died. In AD306, one of the tetrarchs, Constantius Chlorus, died in York and his son Constantine was proclaimed Emperor, reuniting power in one person.

Alicia Salter's book is a study of Diocletian's palace and its original historical context, illustrated with 18th-century engravings and new photographs. It is also a study of Adam himself, a star of the Edinburgh Enlightenment, his monumental publication *The Ruins of Spalatro* and his architectural achievement.

Travel was difficult. There was a war on, and he was only allowed five weeks, but with a team of skilled draughtsmen, he made full record of the nine-acre site, which formed the basis of his subsequent English architectural practice at Kedleston and Syon and, above all, the extraordinary urban enterprise at the Adelphi in London. That Thames-side development of houses over

a substructure of vaulted warehouses was Adam's re-creation of Diocletian's seaside palace.

Adam had decided to study domestic architecture rather than temples, as being more useful to his career. He chose the palace at Spalatro (then a part of Venice), thanks to the influence of his mentor Piranesi. His book is one of the great English architectural folios, with accurate and beautiful engravings by Bartolozzi.

The book itself took seven years to produce. It was an instant success and it established Adam's reputation. *Four Emperors and an Architect* throws new light on the nature of Adam's genius, as well as a not-very-well-known period of Roman imperial history.
John Martin Robinson

History The Riddle of the Labyrinth

Margalit Fox
(Profile Books, £14.99 *£12.99)

ON MARCH 30, 1900, while excavating at the Palace of Knossos in Crete, Arthur Evans unearthed the first of more than 1,000 clay tablets inscribed with strange symbols. These were Europe's earliest written records, unlike any known writing, dating to about 1450BC. But to what civilisation did they belong? The decipherment of the script, which Evans dubbed Linear Script Class B, would feed the obsession

of scholars and amateurs for the next 50 years, changing our understanding of the ancient world.

The Riddle of the Labyrinth focuses on three central characters: Evans, the architect Michael Ventris, and the hereto unsung heroine of the tale, Alice Kober. Margalit Fox leads us through the analytical problems each faced, drawing on writings as abstruse as Akkadian and Cherokee syllabary to show the scant armoury available when neither language nor script is known.

The author's triumph lies in her presentation of this complex subject, narrated with the pace and

excitement of a detective story, in which the reader plays the sleuth.

There is also great pathos. We read of Kober, toiling on the problem for 19 years, during the free time her job permitted; of selfless assistance to fellow researchers; and of wartime paper shortages, which had her keep 180,000 cut and annotated index cards in empty cigarette cartons, to form a primitive database in her New York apartment. 'Even now, more than six decades later, to open one of them is to be met with a faint whiff of mid-century tobacco.'

Where Kober was rigorously analytical, the equally brilliant

Ventris was long misled by Procrustean attempts to fit evidence to his 'Etruscan' theory. Ultimately, however, Ventris would triumph, solving the riddle and recognising an early dialect as the language of Linear B—500 years older than the Greek alphabet.

He would announce his discovery on the BBC in July 1952. 'But' says Miss Fox, 'he did not mention Kober, whose syllabic grid, with its carefully worked-out abstract values, was the foundation of his decipherment.' This book has finally redressed the balance, and given Kober her due.
Teresa Levonian Cole